

(4.)

698. R. 11
4

The Promise of CHRIST's Presence with his
Disciples,

EXPLAINED AND APPLIED IN

A S E R M O N,

J. D.
from the author.
Mar 6th
1792.

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF

BRIDWELL CHAPEL,

Near UFCULME, DEVON,

On WEDNESDAY the 4th of JANUARY, 1792.

By JOSHUA TOULMIN, A.M.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

A N A D D R E S S,

Delivered on the same Occasion

By JOHN WILLIAMS.

TAUNTON:

PRINTED BY T. NORRIS.

Sold by J. JOHNSON, No. 72, St. Paul's Church-yard,
London; S. WOOLMER, Exeter; and Mrs. TOULMIN,
Taunton.

Price ONE SHILLING.

43.

3.

3.

87.



9

T O
RICHARD HALL CLARKE, Esq;
Of BRIDWELL,

The following Discourses,
Delivered in the Chapel erected at his sole
Expence,

And now published at his Request,
And that of the Ministers and Gentlemen
present on the Occasion,

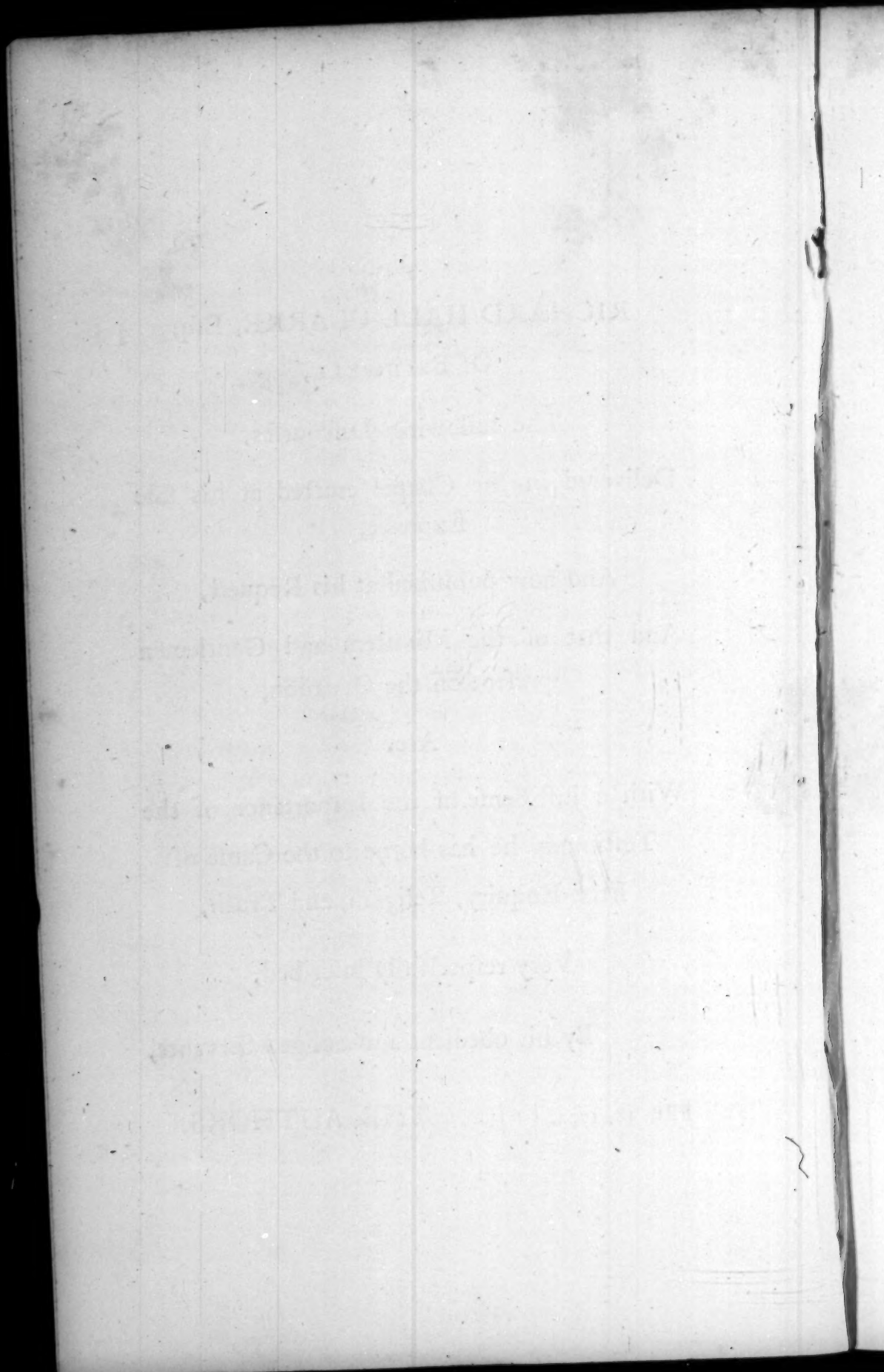
Are,
With a just Sense of the Importance of the
Testimony he has borne to the Cause of
Free-Enquiry, Religion, and Truth,

Very respectfully inscribed,

By his obedient and obliged Servants,

FEB. 18, 1792.

THE AUTHORS.



A D D R E S S.

My Christian Brethren.

BEING assembled to set apart this building for the purpose of public worship, you will naturally expect some account of the principles and sentiments of this society, and of the manner in which our religious services will be conducted. It will take up little of your time to give you a general idea of our views and opinions, and in stating them to you, I shall endeavour to do it with such clearness and perspicuity, as will prevent any one from entertaining improper or mistaken notions of them.

The leading sentiment of our faith, and what we consider as the foundation of all rational religion, is the acknowledgement of the divine unity. In other words we believe, that there is but one God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is only one person or being; that he is unequalled in his perfections; that he is the first cause of all things; that the work of creation is his prerogative, and,

B

like

like his other perfections, incommunicable ; that he alone is our maker and governor, and on that account the only proper object of religious worship and adoration.

We believe, that all things are under his direction, and subject to his controul ; that nothing happens without his interposition and appointment ; that no other being had any part in the original contrivance, or is entrusted with the execution of that plan of government, which God has adopted, but that all beings are his creatures, and equally dependent upon him.

We believe, that God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the sole author of that scheme of redemption which is revealed in the gospel of his son ; that Jesus Christ was no other than his servant and messenger, acting by his authority and deriving his miraculous powers from him.

We believe, that God forgives sin of his own free grace and mercy ; that he wanted no inducement to reconcile *him* to his offending creatures : but that they, being alienated from God, the dispensation of the gospel was intended to induce *them* to be reconciled to him, by assuring them of his love and compassion to the human race, by furnishing them with motives to repentance and obedience to his commandments, with the hope of pardon, and with assurances of being received into the divine favour.

We

We believe, that forgiveness is offered to all who are truly penitent, and that none are excluded from an interest in the salvation of the gospel, but those who are unwilling to forsake the evil of their ways, and turn unto the Lord; that nothing but a holy life and personal virtue will ensure the divine favour, and that habits of piety and devotion, and benevolence of mind are essential and necessary qualifications for the enjoyment of future happiness.

We think that the example which Christ has afforded is most of all adapted to the imitation of his disciples, because he was a man of similar passions, subject to the same infirmities, and exposed to the same temptations.

We think that the sufferings of Christ were intended as a trial of his virtue, and that in bearing them with patience and resignation, he has exhibited to his followers, a pattern of unshaken fortitude in the most trying circumstances. We consider his voluntary submission to the death of the cross, as the most decisive proof of his obedience to God, and of his love to mankind; and contemplating his death in connection with his resurrection, we think that the doctrines of remission of sin, and acceptance with God upon repentance and new obedience, are abundantly confirmed, and the promise of eternal life is rendered secure and unquestionable. We believe that as Christ died, and rose again for us, he will

appear at the last day to raise all mankind from the dead, and to render unto every man according to his works; and that his disciples have peculiar reason to triumph in the prospect of his second appearance, inasmuch as he has assured them, they shall be with him where he is, to behold and partake of his glory.

We believe, that Christ having left the world and miraculous gifts and powers having ceased with the age of the apostles, mankind are left to the exercise of their own power and ability to do the will of God, assisted by the principles, and motives of the gospel, and animated by the expectations to which it raises them; the influence of which principles and motives is proportioned to the apparent evidence of their divine origin; and the encouragement afforded by which expectations arises from the unquestionable certainty of their fulfilment.

While we deny that men are furnished with any supernatural assistance to discharge their duty, we are particularly solicitous to acknowledge the agency of the divine being. We consider the connection between a life of holiness, and the principles and motives of the gospel, as proceeding from that constitution of things which God has established. Believing, that he is the supreme disposer of all events, and the giver of every good and perfect gift, we confess, that at the same time our salvation is to be secured by our own watchfulness and exertion, it
is

is God that worketh in us to will and to do, of his own good pleasure.

From this summary of our faith it is evident, that we reject many doctrines which are received as the doctrines of scripture by the majority of our fellow-christians. We confine the attributes of deity to the Father. The divinity and pre-existence of Jesus Christ are doctrines we do not admit. We contend that his sufferings could have no efficacy to *purchase* the pardon of sin; that the salvation of believers is the consequence of the free grace and mercy of God only; and that all, who have lived a virtuous and holy life, and cultivated a benevolent disposition, will be permitted to enter into the kingdom of our Lord.

To state to you, in the most cursory manner, the reasons which induce us to adopt such sentiments, and to shew how they are supported by reason and scripture, would take up too much of your time on the present occasion. It will be my duty to offer these sentiments, and the arguments on which they are built to your consideration, as opportunities present themselves in the usual course of our religious services; and I trust, my brethren, that I shall be able to do it with that weight of evidence, and extent of candour, which will recommend them to your favourable attention and regard.

Agreeing

Agreeing with the rest of our fellow christians, in the belief of the existence of God; of his government and providence; of our accountableness to him; of his favour to the righteous, and of his displeasure towards the wicked; of the certainty of a resurrection, and of a future state of rewards and punishments, we retain every thing that is necessary to form a virtuous character, and to secure a proper conduct and behaviour in the intercourses of society.

Believing in the rectitude of the divine government; in the universality of God's dominion; in the benevolence of all his designs; in the care and attention of his providence; we have the same foundation with our fellow-christians for trust and confidence in God, the same reason to acquiesce in all his appointments, and the same consolation amidst all the trials and afflictions of human life.

Believing in the divine mission of Jesus Christ, in the truth of the doctrines which he taught, in the obligation of the precepts of his gospel, and in the suitableness of his example; acknowledging the value of that salvation the terms of which he came to reveal; and looking forward to his second appearance as the delegated judge of all men, we think ourselves entitled to the character of his disciples, if we conduct ourselves in a manner consistent with our profession, and that in justice we ought
not

not to be excluded by our fellow-christians from partaking of the blessedness of his kingdom, or be denied an interest in their friendship and charitable regards. Believing that sincerity of heart alone is necessary to recommend his creatures to the favour of the Divine Being, we give a sufficient security for our good will and charity towards our brethren, inasmuch as it is evident, that what we conceive to be sufficient to recommend them to the favour of God, must be thought by us a sufficient claim to the respect and esteem of men.

The sentiments which we have now avowed will perhaps be found to disagree with that system of doctrines, which some of you have been taught to consider as the doctrines of scripture: but we are not less persuaded than yourselves, that we have reason and scripture on our side.

We are sensible, that in presuming to differ from the majority of professing christians, we expose ourselves to their censures, and shall probably be charged with the guilt of schism and heresy; but we contend, that in avowing sentiments which are pronounced to be unscriptural and of human invention, we can only be influenced by a love of truth, and the persuasion that it is to be found in those opinions which we have adopted. We further plead, that if we be mistaken, no man is chargeable with the guilt of errors which he has taken the greatest pains to avoid,

avoid, and which, if perceived he would immediately correct; that he is accountable only for those consequences of his opinions which he acknowledges to arise from them, and that all others, however clearly they may appear to the rest of mankind to be deduced from the premises which he himself has laid down, are not to be advanced as evidence of wilful prejudice, or of allowed mistake.

That religion is a personal concern; that faith depends upon evidence, and not upon the will; and that a man is accountable for his faith to God, and his own conscience alone, and to men only for his conduct as a member of society; are propositions which we advance without fear of their being contested, and on them we found the right of private judgment, and claim the forbearance and candour of our brethren.

Convinced that those doctrines which are most simple and rational will best tend to promote virtue and happiness, we think it our duty openly to profess, and zealously to recommend them to the consideration and reception of others. We think it of importance, that the public services of religion should be conducted in a manner consistent with the peculiar sentiments of every denomination of christians, and that no opinions should be introduced into their acts of devotion, but such as are consistent with their principles. To furnish ourselves and those who join
with

with us in such views of things, with an opportunity of thus conducting the services of religion, and to shew our sense of the importance of public worship, this place has been erected. While we claim the right of worshiping God in that manner which appears to us most rational and consistent with his word, we are ready to allow, and recommend it to others to claim and to use the same liberty; and while we are zealous to recommend, and to extend the influence of those sentiments which we have adopted, we do profess that it is not to any particular sentiments, but to truth we are attached, and it is only *that* we wish to propagate and establish.

In conducting our devotional services a liturgy will be used*; and this mode of worship is adopted by us, because we conceive it does in many respects more effectually secure the purposes of devotion than any other. Prayers repeated from a precomposed form, in which the people of the congregation take a part, are best calculated to engage the attention; they relieve both minister and people from every employ-

* This Liturgy which was used for the service of the day, is entitled "A Common Prayer Book, according to the plan of the Liturgy of the Church of England, with suitable services." Exeter, printed by T. Brice, and sold by J. Johnson No. 72, St. Paul's Church-Yard, London.—Price 4s. sewed.

avoid, and which, if perceived he would immediately correct; that he is accountable only for those consequences of his opinions which he acknowledges to arise from them, and that all others, however clearly they may appear to the rest of mankind to be deduced from the premises which he himself has laid down, are not to be advanced as evidence of wilful prejudice, or of allowed mistake.

That religion is a personal concern; that faith depends upon evidence, and not upon the will; and that a man is accountable for his faith to God, and his own conscience alone, and to men only for his conduct as a member of society; are propositions which we advance without fear of their being contested, and on them we found the right of private judgment, and claim the forbearance and candour of our brethren.

Convinced that those doctrines which are most simple and rational will best tend to promote virtue and happiness, we think it our duty openly to profess, and zealously to recommend them to the consideration and reception of others. We think it of importance, that the public services of religion should be conducted in a manner consistent with the peculiar sentiments of every denomination of christians, and that no opinions should be introduced into their acts of devotion, but such as are consistent with their principles. To furnish ourselves and those who join
with

with us in such views of things, with an opportunity of thus conducting the services of religion, and to shew our sense of the importance of public worship, this place has been erected. While we claim the right of worshipping God in that manner which appears to us most rational and consistent with his word, we are ready to allow, and recommend it to others to claim and to use the same liberty; and while we are zealous to recommend, and to extend the influence of those sentiments which we have adopted, we do profess that it is not to any particular sentiments, but to truth we are attached, and it is only *that* we wish to propagate and establish.

In conducting our devotional services a liturgy will be used*; and this mode of worship is adopted by us, because we conceive it does in many respects more effectually secure the purposes of devotion than any other. Prayers repeated from a precomposed form, in which the people of the congregation take a part, are best calculated to engage the attention; they relieve both minister and people from every employ-

* This Liturgy which was used for the service of the day, is entitled "A Common Prayer Book, according to the plan of the Liturgy of the Church of England, with suitable services." Exeter, printed by T. Brice, and sold by J. Johnson No. 72, St. Paul's Church-Yard, London.—Price 4s. sewed.

ment, but that of impressing upon the heart the sentiments which are uttered by the lips; and prevent the possibility of any thing being introduced into the service, but what is suitable to those devotional feelings which ought to be excited.

Allow me to hint, that those persons who may think proper to attach themselves to this society, should carefully examine the motives by which they are influenced, and should take heed that they be not actuated by any that will not justify them to God, and their own consciences. If they be not persuaded that the sentiments we avow are true and scriptural; if the manner in which our services are conducted do not appear to them well calculated to excite a spirit of devotion; if they be not sensible of the importance of public worship; if they be not solicitous to establish themselves in virtuous principles, and to form habits of piety, holiness, and benevolence, they would do well to absent themselves from our assemblies; for it should be remembered by us all, that to distinguish ourselves by any peculiarity of sentiments, is to attract the eyes of the world, and to direct them to our conduct and behaviour. To profess an attachment to the religion of Christ, and a zeal to maintain that religion in its native simplicity and purity, and to act in a manner inconsistent with its precepts, is to do it the greatest disservice.

disservice of which we are capable. There are no greater enemies to religion than the inconsistent professors of it.

The relation which I sustain to this congregation, I am sensible, requires of me persevering care and exertions. It will be my business to state to you the evidence of the truth and authenticity of the sacred scriptures, to unfold to you their meaning, to endeavour to make you sensible of their value, to engage you to study them with attention, to inspire you with a love of divine truth, and to attach you so firmly to the profession of it, that no sufferings or persecution with which you can possibly be exercised in the present state, may be of sufficient strength or severity to make you desert the cause.

To lead you to virtue and holiness, to impress upon your minds the principles and motives of the gospel, to animate you in your christian course, to admonish you of the danger to which you are exposed from the enemies of your salvation, to warn you of the temptations to which you are liable, and to fortify your minds with strength to resist them, by bringing to your recollection the importance of the divine favour, and the pain and misery to which a vicious course will conduct you, are other duties which are connected with the exercise of the christian ministry. If a sincere and earnest desire of contributing to your edification; if resolutions of zeal and

diligence; if devout and fervent wishes for your best interest, and your everlasting welfare, will in any degree assist me to discharge these duties, and will draw down the blessing of Almighty God upon my labours, I trust I am not without those qualifications which will render me serviceable to you, and to the interest of religion. At the same time, I am conscious how frequently the warmest zeal is remitted, and how often the sincerest purposes of fidelity and diligence relax into carelessness and indifference. It is impossible but that you will have repeated occasions to exercise your candour and forbearance towards me: I am persuaded that you are well disposed to make every favourable allowance for the weakness of human nature, and will be ready to overlook every thing that does not proceed from allowed and wilful negligence. I am aware too of how much greater condemnation he will be thought worthy, who, at the same time, that he enjoins integrity of conduct, and consistency of character upon others, is himself guilty of those irregularities which he condemns, and runs into those excesses which he pronounces criminal. But if this guilt be avoided, I am sure involuntary offences will not be severely observed by you.

To investigate the principles of our holy religion, is a study, in which, I own to you, I enjoy peculiar pleasure; nor am I conscious of any greater satisfaction

faction than what is experienced by me, when my researches into the meaning of the sacred writings are happily crowned with success. The duties of my profession are those in which I engage with the greatest alacrity. But in my researches after truth I shall also be animated by a desire of promoting your improvement and edification. In the discourses which I shall be called upon publickly to address to you, it will be my object to communicate to you those discoveries which appear to me to be most important and useful. To the candid enquirer I shall at all times be ready to impart that knowledge, which the employments of my profession afford me a more favourable opportunity of attaining, than can be enjoyed by those who are engaged in the business of the world. To be successful in extending the knowledge of the truth, I shall consider as an ample compensation for all the labour I have bestowed on the investigation of it; and to be instrumental in communicating to you that peace and satisfaction which result from just views of God and of his government, will be a perpetual source of pleasure to me, amidst all the discouragements, which are connected with the exercise of the christian ministry among protestant dissenters.

In addressing you from this place, I shall consider myself at liberty to bring forward, and to support those sentiments, by the profession of which we are particularly

particularly characterised, and to oppose those, which appear to me to be irrational, and inconsistent with the word of God; but in doing so, I trust I shall never lose sight of that respect for the sentiments of others, or that candour towards their persons, to which every honest mind is entitled. My first object will be to convince you of the importance of right conduct, and next to that, I would make you sensible of the value of right sentiments; they are too intimately connected to be separated. Truth is too important to be concealed and just views of things are too nearly allied to the practice of virtue to be considered as of little consequence by its advocates.

And now, my brethren, I commend you to God and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON.

S E R M O N.

MATT. xviii. 20.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

AMONGST the various subjects, which offer for our discussion from the pulpit, those are certainly proper and useful, which more immediately tend to assist you to understand the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures; and, especially, to ascertain the sense of such passages, as are frequently quoted according to their sound, without investigating the connexion or allowing for the peculiar idiom of of scripture language. It is the more necessary to bring forward and examine such passages, as the indolence and inattention of many tempt them too easily to acquiesce in a sense, in which they have been accustomed to hear those texts mentioned; and which they feel a reluctance to give up. This reluctance is increased, if some opinions, in their apprehensions, particularly sacred and important, arise from this
received

received interpretation and are supported by it. By this means error, while the sound of scripture is a made a sanction to it, taketh deep root.

Thus the Lutherans explaining the words of our text, according to the literal sense, have argued from it against the actual ascension of Christ into heaven; and have endeavoured to support by it their notion, that his ascension denotes not a change of place, but of condition. By the Papists, the words have been alledged to justify the claims of synods and councils to authority and infallibility*. And others have often produced them as an argument of the deity of Christ, because it is conceived the text ascribes to Him that immensity which belongs only to deity.

These hints may serve to give you a conviction of of the expedience, nay importance, of not taking it for granted, without enquiry, that the sense of a text commonly adopted is the true one. An enquiry, at least, should be made into the matter; if that enquiry establish the usually received sense, it will be a satisfaction to us, that what we have before taken on authority we now discern to be a just interpretation; and if the result should be otherwise, our minds will gain new light, and we shall be put, or kept, in the tract of becoming interpreters of scripture for our-

* Phillippi a Limborch Theologia Christiana: lib. iii. cap. xiv. § 18, 19. et lib. vii. cap. xix. § 26. Editio tertia, 1700.

selves. Should the detection of a false interpretation of a text dispossess us of some favourite principle and the inferences connected with it, yet it will establish in our minds the authority of scripture itself and suggest other instructions and principles as useful, practical, and devotional; accompanied with this advantage, of appearing to our judgment and conviction just and true. But these reflections carry me too far from my particular design, which is

To examine the meaning of Christ's gracious promise in the text : And

To point out the lessons to be drawn from it, whether such as are always useful, or those which are particularly pertinent to the occasion of our present meeting.

First, Let us examine the meaning of this encouraging promise; "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The points which, obviously, offer to our consideration are, to whom is this assurance given and what is its import?

[They, to whom the promise is made, are described as those who "are gathered together in the name of Christ." In the preceding verses, our Lord Christ lays down the method, which he would have taken with "a brother," i. e. a fellow christian, who had committed some fault, against another. He recommends first a private admonition from the person of-

D

fended

fended to him who had committed the fault : which, if it be not efficacious, is to be repeated in the presence of two or three other persons. Should this be ineffectual, the matter is to be laid before the whole congregation, or church. If the advice and admonition of the congregation should be disregarded, the irreclaimable offender is to be cut off from their communion and to be considered as one of the world at large, with whom they have no particular connection.

To authorise his apostles to lay down this mode of proceeding as a rule for the conduct of his disciples in future ages, and to act upon it in their own ministry, he adds a general declaration of the divine sanction which would accompany their instructions :
 “ Verily I say unto you, whatsoever you shall bind
 “ on earth, shall be bound in heaven : and whatso-
 “ ever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in
 “ heaven :” i. e. “ When I am removed from you,
 “ the powers that I now have will devolve upon
 “ you by the descent of the holy spirit ; and
 “ whatever you do by the direction of that spirit
 “ shall be ratified in heaven*.” Nay, he extends
 this encouragement to their prayers in his cause,
 as well as to their preaching. “ Again, I say
 “ unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth,
 “ as touching any thing, that they shall ask, it shall

* Dr. Priestley's Harmony in loc.

“ be done for them of my father who is in heaven.” Though these words refer, particularly, to the apostles and to the age of miracles, yet they afford a just ground for the fine moral lesson, which some good commentators have drawn from them: viz. “ That union is so pleasing to God, especially that union which has for its object the mutual improvement of one another in virtue and the correcting of each others’ errors, that it may hope for the greatest assistance and blessing from heaven*.”

These particular assurances, appropriate to the case of the apostles, are supported and succeeded by a general declaration of favour to whomsoever, though meeting in ever so small a number, assembled in the name of Christ, and for his cause. “ For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them†.”]

The Jews, it seems, had a notion that ten should concur in social prayer, if any extraordinary success were expected. And it is thought, that there may

* Ces paroles ne doivent pas se prendre à la lettre. Le sens est, que l’union est si agreable à Dieu, sur tout cette union qui se forme dans le dessein de se porter les uns les autres à la vertu, et de se corriger mutuellement, que dans cet état il n’y a point de grace qu’on ne puisse esperer de Dieu. Beaufobre et Lenfant in loc.

† The paragraphs between the crotchets were omitted in the delivery of the discourse.

be in the text a reference to this opinion*. But, as it was an amiable trait in the character of Christ, that he affected not parade nor quoted popular applause; so the grace and blessings of the gospel are freely, and with great condescension, offered to all, who will receive them throughout the earth, without regard to their rank or number. Every humble, pious suitor will be acceptable. No one who acteth upon the authority of Christ, and seeketh his glory, shall lose his reward. Two or three, gathered together in his name will meet with the approbation of heaven.

[The exact rendering of the words† would be *into my name*, which is somewhat different from a more common phrase‡, *in the name of Christ*. The latter signifies acting by his authority and according to his instructions. The former more strictly denotes making a profession of his religion and pursuing a conduct which has, for its object, his honour and cause. The difference indeed is not very material: for the profession of his religion implies the belief of his divine mission and authority, and every step we take to advance his cause must be regulated by the instructions of his gospel. It is sufficient, that the

* Poli Synopsis et Doddridge in loc.

† Εἰς τὸ ὄνομα.

‡ Εν τῷ ὀνόματι. See Sykes on Redemption, p. 176, 177.
phrase

phrase clearly points out, that the^{re} association of two or three, to which the blessing is promised, is not on the ground of civil friendship or for the purpose of secular interest; but of a religious nature, animated by evangelical piety and directed to the advancement of the christian cause.

The duties of religious worship come, more especially, under this description. But whether they be stated or occasional, according to our usual custom or at some extraordinary call, the promise extends to them all, and looks with the same encouraging aspect on each. Nay, several may meet together, without joining in prayer, only to communicate or receive instruction in christian truth, or to form schemes and consult together for the spread of christian knowledge, and to promote, on the principles of the gospel, the practice of piety and virtue; and *they* may be truly said to assemble together "for the name of Christ." Every meeting that hath his honour, the advancement of his cause, among ourselves or with others, for its end, will be owned and blessed by heaven. But this leads me]

To consider the import of Christ's gracious promise: "There am I in the midst of them." If the text hath any difficulty, it lieth in this clause. But the phrase so often occurs in other places, that if it be misunderstood here, it is owing to our overlooking those passages; in which, though it doth not come
from

from the lips of Christ, yet the general language is the same, and the sense there is properly a key to its meaning here.

To be with any one, is to afford favour, protection and blessing. Thus Gen. xxi. 20. God is said *to be with Ishmael*; because he was preserved and provided for, in the wilderness. And, ver. 22. Abimelech, seeing the prosperity which attended the patriarch, says unto Abraham: "*God is with thee* in all thou dost." God himself, chap. xxviii. 15. on account of the protection and other blessings he promised to Jacob, says, "*Behold I am with thee.*" Because Joseph was a prosperous man the historian remarks, chap. xxxix. 2. "*The Lord was with him.*" When a security against their enemies is assured to the Israelites, it is confirmed by this general declaration; "*The Lord thy God is amongst you.*" When, at the same time, the Divine Being was about to display himself to them, not by a visible presence, but by his power in sending hornets amongst their enemies to destroy them. Deut. vii. 21.

On the contrary, when it is threatned to the Israelites, that they should not be successful in battle, and that heavy judgments should befall them, the ground of their calamities is said to be that "*the Lord was not amongst them:*" meaning, not that his personal presence would be withdrawn, for that must ever fill all places, but that his favour and blessing

bleſſing would be withheld. Deut. i. 42. chap. xxxi. 17.

This is the general meaning of the phraſe: it imports the communication of aſſiſtance and a bleſſing in whatever way that aid or bleſſing is afforded. It is by no means limited to a viſible and perſonal preſence. So that it might be truly and properly uſed by holy men, acting under a divine authority, and promiſing the divine protection and favour: who, though ſpeaking in their own perſons, are to be underſtood as ſpeaking only in the name of God, or as *his voice*; uttering *his* declarations and pronouncing, as *his* mouth, *his* promiſes.

It deſerves attention, that the very language of our text is thus uſed by Moſes: when ſo far from intending his own future, real preſence, he was delivering his laſt, his dying exhortation to the Iſraelites and to Joſhua, his ſucceſſor. “And he gave Joſhua, the ſon of Nun, a charge and ſaid, “Be ſtrong and of good courage; for thou ſhalt “bring the children of Iſrael into the land which I “ſware unto them, and *I will be with thee.*” Deut. xxxi. 23.

After this can we be ſurpriſed, that the holy Jeſus, in whom dwelt the fulneſs of all ſpiritual gifts and powers, ſhould adopt this language: or can we miſtake his meaning, when he ſaith, “where two or “three are gathered together in my name, there am
“ I in

"I in the midst of them." If *his* words had been considered in connection with those of Moses, his meaning could not have been mistaken. But christians, in after ages, first adopted erroneous notions of his person and character, and then applied those notions as the rules of interpreting his language, and not the meaning which that same language bears in scripture itself.

A little attention indeed, to our Lord's words, in other places, would have convinced men, that he spake not here, of a real and personal presence. For, when he was expressly forewarning his disciples, that he should be taken from them and go to his Father, he adds; "I will not leave you orphans; *"I will come unto you:"* i. e. not in his own person, but *by the spirit of truth*, who should abide with them. John xiv. 18. compared with the 16th verse. In the same manner of expression he addressed Paul in a vision: "Be not afraid, but speak *"and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee;"* which was only an assurance, that the preaching of the apostle should be accompanied with a divine power and protection, and be very successful. For it is added; "No man shall set on thee, to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city." Acts xviii. 10.

Thus the gracious promise in the text, holds forth an assurance of *the good effects*, which should follow
the

the assembling together in his name*. The blessing of heaven would attend it, and success would crown it. From this research it may be submitted to you, whether the words are not properly paraphrased by a great writer. "Whenever so few of you are assembled, as christians, for any purpose that respects my religion, it is the same thing as if myself were there: so that your prayers and your acts will have the same force as mine†."

This interpretation is established by facts that occur in the New Testament, which both elucidate the meaning, and confirm the truth of Christ's promise. The appeal may be made to the history of the conversion of Cornelius: when, at a private family meeting of his kinsmen and near friends, as Peter was preaching, and they were assembled to hear all things that were commanded them of God, the holy spirit fell on them. Thus Christ was with that select party. The appeal may be made to the history of the preaching of Philip to the eunuch: when such a blessing attended the conversation of these two persons on the character of Christ, that the mind of the nobleman was convinced, he was baptized, and being enlightened and converted, by the knowledge of the truth, he went on his way

* Bp. Pearce thus glosses the words. See his Commentary.

† Dr. Priestley's Harmony in loc.

rejoicing. Were not, in this instance, the words of Christ truly accomplished.

In short, it is agreeable to the current manner of Christ's expressing himself to represent *that* as done by him and his power or presence, which was done by the spirit and power of God in consequence of his word and in fulfilment of his promise. So he tells the apostles, John xiv. 13, 14. "Whatsoever you shall ask in my name *that will I do*; if you ask any thing in my name, *I will do it.*" But a little after, in the same farewell conversation, he adds; chap. xvi. 23. "In that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, *he will give it you.*" By which it appears, that Christ did not mean that he himself should do the miraculous works which he promised should be performed in confirmation of the gospel, but his heavenly Father. So, in the text, he is to be understood, not as engaging to be personally and really present, but, as assuring us that his heavenly Father would own and bless those, how few soever, who should meet together in his name. In the same manner as Moses could not be supposed to promise to *be himself*, after he was dead, with Joshua; but that God would be with him by his power and protection.

But it may be thought, that too much time and labour have been given to explain a phrase, the meaning

meaning of which is not far to seek. And certainly this might be said, if a conclusion had not been drawn from the text, which entirely confounds the character of Christ with *that* of the Being who filleth heaven and earth. Our Lord uniformly speaks of himself under the character of one of the human race, as having been born into this world, as coming into the world to execute a divine commission, and as about to leave the world and go to his Father. Through all the New Testament he is spoken of as having lived on earth, executed his ministry by journeying from one place to another, having died on the cross, having been raised from the dead, and being ascended into the heavens which are to receive him till the time of the restitution of all things. All this language ascribes to the holy Jesus only the same limited, local presence as belongs to any one of mankind. Yet from the text he hath been concluded to be omnipresent and to be therefore the Supreme Deity. From what hath been offered you will judge, with what force and truth this conclusion is drawn? You will judge, whether the same conclusion might not, with equal truth and propriety, be drawn from the words of Moses?

Far be it from us to depreciate Christ Jesus in the apprehension of any. Far be it from us to deny him any excellence or dignity, really connected with his character or nature. We wish only to assist you

rejoicing. Were not, in this instance, the words of Christ truly accomplished.

In short, it is agreeable to the current manner of Christ's expressing himself to represent *that* as done by him and his power or presence, which was done by the spirit and power of God in consequence of his word and in fulfilment of his promise. So he tells the apostles, John xiv. 13, 14. "Whatsoever you shall ask in my name *that will I do*; if you ask any thing in my name, *I will do it*." But a little after, in the same farewell conversation, he adds; chap. xvi. 23. "In that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, *he will give it you*." By which it appears, that Christ did not mean that he himself should do the miraculous works which he promised should be performed in confirmation of the gospel, but his heavenly Father. So, in the text, he is to be understood, not as engaging to be personally and really present, but, as assuring us that his heavenly Father would own and bless those, how few soever, who should meet together in his name. In the same manner as Moses could not be supposed to promise to *be himself*, after he was dead, with Joshua; but that God would be with him by his power and protection.

But it may be thought, that too much time and labour have been given to explain a phrase, the meaning

meaning of which is not far to seek. And certainly this might be said, if a conclusion had not been drawn from the text, which entirely confounds the character of Christ with *that* of the Being who filleth heaven and earth. Our Lord uniformly speaks of himself under the character of one of the human race, as having been born into this world, as coming into the world to execute a divine commission, and as about to leave the world and go to his Father. Through all the New Testament he is spoken of as having lived on earth, executed his ministry by journeying from one place to another, having died on the cross, having been raised from the dead, and being ascended into the heavens which are to receive him till the time of the restitution of all things. All this language ascribes to the holy Jesus only the same limited, local presence as belongs to any one of mankind. Yet from the text he hath been concluded to be omnipresent and to be therefore the Supreme Deity. From what hath been offered you will judge, with what force and truth this conclusion is drawn? You will judge, whether the same conclusion might not, with equal truth and propriety, be drawn from the words of Moses?

Far be it from us to depreciate Christ Jesus in the apprehension of any. Far be it from us to deny him any excellence or dignity, really connected with his character or nature. We wish only to assist you

to form just and scriptural ideas of it. And it ought to be considered, while men are most fitly afraid of degrading him in their own conceptions, or in the representations they give of him, whether there ought not to an holy fear, lest they detract, though unintentionally, from the peerless majesty of the ONE GOD and FATHER of all. Omnipresence can really belong only to one being or person, and if it be ascribed to any other, is it not, as it were, to set up a rival to the Supreme, and to divide his essential, distinguishing perfections? It was the declaration of Christ himself; "I seek not *my own glory*; I "honour the FATHER." In *this*, as well as other instances, his example should govern us: and we should be jealous for the glory of God the Father, as well as zealous for the honour of his Christ. In the case before us the honour of Christ is preserved by understanding his words, as the language is to be understood in other places, and by confiding in the truth of his gracious promise. This brings me to the practical reflections arising from our subject.

1. This is great encouragement to our religious worship and to our joint endeavours, to serve the cause of Christ. By the explanation, which we have given of our text, the consolation and encouragement it administers is not diminished, but is preserved in its full force: *that* does not depend on the strict and literal sense of the words. Were Christ personally present

present with those assembled in his name, no benefit or comfort would be derived from it, unless he were to exercise his gracious influence and favour. It is the power of Christ displayed on our behalf, that makes the blessing. That power, though he be withdrawn from our world, may rest upon us by the efficacy of his word and ordinances and by God's gracious regard of our intercourses for the name of his son. If our prayers be accepted and our endeavours be followed with good effects, this is a comfort; this is a blessing.

Every enterprize is undertaken with spirit, in proportion as we have reason to expect success. What can be a greater encouragement, a more animating motive to exertion, than the promise of God? Of that God, whose benevolence is everlasting and whose truth is unchangeable. These promises reach to us, on whom the ends of the world are come. Where the dispositions are equally sincere, humble and pious, where the cause is the same, and where the purposes are the same, the grace and favour, as the occasion requires, will be the same.

The blessed Jesus, we may suppose, particularly referred in the words of the text, to the miraculous powers and gifts, which would accompany the labours of the apostles and be poured out on the first believers. But these were given as testimonials of the divine favour: these were bestowed with a further

ther view than to display extraordinary energy ; with a view to the conversion and edification of mankind were they bestowed. This view is still carried on by the preaching of the gospel and by the fervent prayers and zealous exertions of the disciples of Christ. The text assures us that these prayers and exertions will not be lost.

The divine blessing is not limited to one period of time : nor is the energy of divine truth, of that gospel which is "the power of God unto salvation," confined to one age. Through all time the tabernacle of God is with the children of men. In every age is he present with the devout, humble mind: In every age, where two or three are gathered together, from pure affection to the cause of his son, their design will be accepted and blessed.

We should have esteemed it an happiness to have conversed with Christ in the days of his flesh, and to have heard from his lips the heavenly words of truth and life. We should have reckoned it a privilege, to have seen the storms and winds obeying his voice, and diseases healed or ~~dæmons~~ dispossessed by his word. We should rejoiced to have been with that favoured company of his disciples, whom he "led out as far as Bethany ; and lifting up his hands "blessed them." But more important blessings, more valuable effects are intimated to us by the promise of the text. *There* our wonder might be excited ;

excited; our curiosity gratified: but *here* are we to expect the advancement of spiritual perfection and happiness.

Let *ever so few* be gathered together in the name of Christ, the word of truth enlightens them: the doctrine of salvation edifies and improves them: God looks upon them with favour; and the end of their assembling together will not be lost. Our religious assemblies, it is to be lamented, are often thin; and our houses of prayer empty. But is not this a thought full of consolation and encouragement, that the favour of God rests upon them, and that his blessing will follow them? In one way or other the good effects will appear; either in our devout pleasure and religious edification, or in our future recompence with that being, who will not forget the works of faith and the labours of love. We learn from this subject,

2. That it should not discourage us, though few should join us in religious worship, or unite with us in our pious exertions for the cause of Christ. It is undoubtedly, pleasing to see a full assembly and it invigorates the spirits. We wish to have our conduct and pursuits sanctioned by others. We feel a reluctance to stand alone in any cause: it seems to expose us to shame, and we fear that our best endeavours, if unsupported, will be ineffectual. And, through inconsideration, or the force of the imitative

imitative faculty, we follow the multitude, merely because it is the multitude.

But would men reflect, they would perceive, that the deference paid to numbers is not rational, nor necessary to any purposes of personal improvement, to usefulness to the cause of truth and righteousness, or to our acceptance with God*. Such, through all

* Since this discourse was transcribing for the press, the author has met with the following remarks of a valuable writer for liberty, free enquiry and catholicism, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. "Our labour should be given," says he, "not to purchase votes and obtain a superiority of numbers, but to discover those fundamental principles of truth, on which every one may discern that he can safely rely. We often see, that God, by the most despised instrument, disperses the clouds of error. But as long as a submission and deference are paid principally to numbers and to external dignity and splendor; as long as the concurring judgment of the majority passeth as a law; nothing is more certain, that so long, generally, will Satan prevail." *Non tantopere laboretur in redimendis suffragiis, eorumq; implendo qui vincere possit numero; sed magis ut ea invenirentur veritatis fundamenta, quibus videret se tuto quisq; posse initi. Viderimus profecto non raro, etiam per contemptissimum quemque, Deum magnas disjicere errorum nebulas. At quamdiu numero, atq; extemæ dignitatis splendori primæ potioresque tribuentur partes; quamdiu majoris partis consensus, quasi legis loco fuerit. nihil certius est, quam fore, ut plerumque vincat Satanas. Acontii Stratagemata Satanæ. 1652. lib. iv. p. 188, 189. i. e. The Stratagems of Satan. An author from whom Mr. Lindsey quotes some fine passages in his Historical View. p. 73, 100.*

ages,

ages, hath been the state of the world, that the good alone hath been, frequently, owing to a few. Who were the lights of the heathen world, but a small number of philosophers, rising up in different periods and thinly scattered through various countries? What was the state of the jewish church when Elijah, seeing the corruptions of the times thought that he was left alone in his adherence to the worship of the true God? In the Babylonish captivity, what proportion did the Jews bear to the nation, amongst whom they resided? Yet the union of the three pious worthies in disobeying the idolatrous edict of Nebuchadnezzar, and the solitary worship of Daniel were signalized with the approbation of heaven and productive of important good consequences. What was the case in the commencement of christianity, and during the ministry of Christ himself? Though the eclat of his wonderful works drew multitudes after him, few believed in him; fewer still owned him before the world, and his disciples were a little flock, yet these few not only received the power of becoming the sons of God, but were the happy instruments of providence in disseminating those principles of truth and life, which were in after times, amongst the Gentiles, "the hope of glory," and have been "salvation to the ends of the earth." The Christians, at first, even in the days of the apostles, and after the resurrection of Christ, were a small sect, incon-

considerable in number and every where spoken against ; yet, in consequence of their faith and zeal, the gospel, which against all the opposition of fashion and the multitude they embraced, hath become the religion of a great part of the world.

So true is it that feeble efforts may be and have been followed with a great effect ; and “ where two “ or three are gathered together ” to worship God or “ in the name of Jesus,” those few have been edified, the public cause of religious truth promoted, and God found of them that seek him.

What, indeed, have numbers to do with the court of heaven ? What is a full assembly, what are multitudes of worshippers in the eye of God ; before that great and glorious Being, before whom “ the nations are as a drop of the bucket ; ” yea, “ all nations are before him as nothing and they are “ counted to him as less than nothing and vanity ? ” With him sincerity of devotion is every thing, and the person of an humble and contrite heart, though standing far off by himself, is his temple.

These reflections, which are evidently just, should correct that stress which many are apt to lay on worshipping where there is a great number. It is a pleasure to a reflecting mind to read, as we do read in the New Testament, of churches that did not extend beyond the circle of a family ; nor even always to that. We read of the church in the house of Philemon,

lemon, of that in the house of Aquilla and Priscilla, and of another in the house of Nymphas. What was wanting to entitle these little communities to that name? They were believers, assembling together in the name of Christ, having his interest in view, and enjoying his promised blessing of the divine presence and favour. The most crowded assembly may consist but of few real worshippers; sincere in their devotion and attached to the cause of piety and truth. A full house may be compared to an extensive field, in which the seed may be sown in great abundance; but as the fertility of the ground is to be estimated not by the quantity of the seed sown, but by the produce; so not the number of those who say, *Amen*, or who hear the word, but the progress made in divine knowledge and in the practice of righteousness will constitute the true glory of the assembly and prove the usefulness of the ministry.

There may arise circumstances, under which it will be a credit to a minister, that he is left by a great proportion of his people. It was an honour to Christ, that many went back, and walked no more with him; for this desertion was provoked by his fidelity in not softening their worldly views. Yet he was greater and more useful as the preacher of truth, than if he had met their wishes and tampered with their prejudices. Those who remained with him were the seals of his ministry, and the

supports of his cause. Many an excellent discourse did the holy Jesus deliver, in a parlour, to a private family ; and remarkable was the effect of the admirable instructions he conveyed in a sermon he preached to a single person, the woman of Samaria.

It hath often happened, and still is the case, that they who would worship the Almighty in sincerity and truth, agreeably to their own apprehensions of the nature and purity of christian worship ; or that he who would not handle the word of God deceitfully but by manifestation of the truth, must act in a narrow sphere : the one must be satisfied with a few hearers, and the others must meet in a small company. For, in an early period of christianity, great corruptions have been mingled with the christian doctrine. The reformation from popery did, but in a degree, remove these corruptions. Many yet remain. It is the judgment of some us, at least, that many yet deface the glory, and enervate the spirit, of pure christianity. In this case, what have we to do, but to withdraw from those societies where we conceive the worship is not directed to the proper object, or where human inventions have been blended with it ?

There may not appear to the many, perhaps, ground for separation : for error and will-worship have always had numerous partisans. But “two or three gathered together in the name of Christ” are sufficient to edify one another ; and may, according to
to

to Christ's promise, expect the acceptance and favour of God. It seldom happens, that religious principles can be freely discussed in a mixed and large audience. Men are alarmed and grow angry, if their notions are attacked. It is often necessary, that he, who not pleasing men but God, would make a fair, impartial exhibition of divine truth, must rest satisfied with doing it to a few, who are capable of bearing it.

On these grounds, as men's minds become more informed and enlightened, and as it becomes a matter of conscience with them to preserve the faith of Christ pure and undefiled, it will be necessary to form distinct associations for religious worship. It should be no bar to the forming such distinct religious communities that they will consist of a few only. *It was thus, that the kingdom of Christ was first formed.* To associations of two or three for his cause, he has given the sanction of his authority and the encouragement of his promise. And it cannot admit a doubt, whether it be not preferable to worship the only true God, with our own family only, agreeably to the scriptures and in the language of sincerity and truth, than to join the largest society with every circumstance of state, convenience and splendor in a worship which the scriptures forbid, and our hearts disapprove?

On

On these principles, the little sanctuary, in which we have now for the first time met together, is built: they have been judiciously and candidly stated in the Address you have heard. These walls stand as a monument of a pious desire to have the worship of Almighty God conducted on a scriptural plan, of having the prayers and praises offered up only to one divine being, the God and FATHER of our Lord Jesus Christ; and of having the word of the gospel preached here, without hurting the minds of others, with perfect freedom, but with candour. This design, it is hoped, may be and will be pursued without interrupting the offices of friendship and neighbourhood, without any alienation of christian charity and good will towards other Christians, or those who will continue to assemble in a nearly adjoining house of prayer*. *Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ* be ever with THEM.

Let us all, however divided as to places of assembling together, follow one object: let *that* be TRUTH, and truth only. I am induced here though it may be a digression, to give you the farewell speech, to his congregation, of Mr. Robinson, the

* There has been for a great number of years, a society of Protestant Dissenters in the town of Uffculme.

father of the Independents, in the last century, as pertinent in this connection. "For my part," says he, "I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of
 " of the reformed churches, who are come to a
 " period in religion, and will go at present no further
 " than the instruments of their reformation. The
 " Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what
 " Luther saw; whatever part of his will God hath
 " revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it: and the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where
 " they were left by that great man of God, who yet
 " saw not all things. This is a misery much to be
 " lamented. For, though they were burning and
 " shining lights in their times, yet they penetrated
 " not into the whole counsel of God; but were they
 " now living, would be as willing to embrace farther
 " light as that which they first received. I beseech
 " you remember, that it is an article of your church
 " covenant, that you be ready to receive whatever
 " truth shall be made known to you from the written
 " word of God*."

The misery here pathetically lamented, doth by no means exist now to the same degree, in which it prevailed at that time. But much of the same disposition to rest in the points, to which the reformation was at first carried, still remains. There is still much

* Neal's History of the Puritans, 8vo. vol. II. p. 130.

aversion to free-enquiry; and with great reluctance are long received sentiments, or even phrases, given up. This being the case, it is with great propriety, that we call upon men to "prove all things, to try the spirits and to examine whether they be in Christ," acting upon the truly christian plan. Let the numbers, who will do this be ever so small, God is with them; and the principles which they embrace, if they be his truth, will prevail.

To us it seems, that this is remarkably the case with respect to those *unitarian* sentiments, on which this place of worship is opened. They are gaining ground in proportion as men enquire and examine. About one hundred and fifty years since Mr. Biddle raised a little society to hold forth this faith*. That was broken up with his death. The excellent Mr. Emlyn, after his sufferings in Ireland, preached to a small congregation in the metropolis united in the same sentiments. This did not long subsist†. Under the great Mr. Peirce arose, in a neighbouring city‡, another community of devout worshippers, on the same plan, which, though not large, hath existed to this day. The seed sown, in the first instance, hath not been lost. The light which was kindled, though apprehended, for a time and even for years,

* See the author's Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Biddle.

† Dr. Foster's Funeral Sermon for Mr. Emlyn, p. 37.

‡ Exeter.

to have been extinguished, still existed; and hath broken forth again, and now spreads with a growing brightness and power, and will, we doubt not, yet spread.

These things are mentioned to shew the value and influence of a testimony borne to the truth, though at first few only discern it: they are brought forward to quicken and animate every attempt to promote religious discussion and to preserve the sincerity of a religious profession*. The weakness and errors, that may remain, will in time be done away; and the

*.The above remarks, it is presumed, will prevent any one's concluding from the mention of these facts only, that Unitarian sentiments originated with Mr. Biddle. They are adduced, not to give the history of Unitarianism, but only to illustrate a general principle, viz. that the efforts even of a few will have their effect. Mr. Biddle is to be considered not as the author of a new sect, but as the reviver of a long lost truth. Though, even before his time, this truth was not so lost, but some knew it and avowed it. Soon after the commencement of the reformation in England, Unitarians were so numerous that government was alarmed at the spread of their doctrine. In Poland it had been embraced and professed by whole societies of Christians. It was the doctrine of the earliest Christians derived from the discourses of Christ and from the instructions and writings of the apostles. *There is ONE GOD, the FATHER: and one Mediator between God and men, the MAN CHRIST JESUS.*

G

good

aversion to free-enquiry; and with great reluctance are long received sentiments, or even phrases, given up. This being the case, it is with great propriety, that we call upon men to "prove all things, to try the spirits and to examine whether they be in Christ," acting upon the truly christian plan. Let the numbers, who will do this be ever so small, God is with them; and the principles which they embrace, if they be his truth, will prevail.

To us it seems, that this is remarkably the case with respect to those *unitarian* sentiments, on which this place of worship is opened. They are gaining ground in proportion as men enquire and examine. About one hundred and fifty years since Mr. Biddle raised a little society to hold forth this faith*. That was broken up with his death. The excellent Mr. Emlyn, after his sufferings in Ireland, preached to a small congregation in the metropolis united in the same sentiments. This ~~did~~ not long subsist†. Under the great Mr. Peirce arose, in a neighbouring city‡, another community of devout worshippers, on the same plan, which, though not large, hath existed to this day. The seed sown, in the first instance, hath not been lost. The light which was kindled, though apprehended, for a time and even for years,

* See the author's Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Biddle.

† Dr. Foster's Funeral Sermon for Mr. Emlyn, p. 37.

‡ Exeter.

to have been extinguished, still existed; and hath broken forth again, and now spreads with a growing brightness and power, and will, we doubt not, yet spread.

These things are mentioned to shew the value and influence of a testimony borne to the truth, though at first few only discern it: they are brought forward to quicken and animate every attempt to promote religious discussion and to preserve the sincerity of a religious profession*. The weakness and errors, that may remain, will in time be done away; and the

*.The above remarks, it is presumed, will prevent any one's concluding from the mention of these facts only, that Unitarian sentiments originated with Mr. Biddle. They are adduced, not to give the history of Unitarianism, but only to illustrate a general principle, viz. that the efforts even of a few will have their effect. Mr. Biddle is to be considered not as the author of a new sect, but as the reviver of a long lost truth. Though, even before his time, this truth was not so lost, but some knew it and avowed it. Soon after the commencement of the reformation in England, Unitarians were so numerous that government was alarmed at the spread of their doctrine. In Poland it had been embraced and professed by whole societies of Christians. It was the doctrine of the earliest Christians derived from the discourses of Christ and from the instructions and writings of the apostles. *There is ONE GOD, the FATHER: and one Mediator between God and men, the MAN CHRIST JESUS.*

G

good

good done will be productive of more good. God, by his holy son Jesus hath said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

But I would hasten to a close; suffer the words of exhortation, if we call upon you, Christians, to carry this principle, of acting with a regard to the name of Christ, to the authority of his laws and the glory of his cause, into *the whole of your conduct*. "To me," saith the apostle, "to live is Christ." No motto can better suit those who are placed under his instructions, and are to look for eternal life through him. It becometh us to remember what we owe to our character and hope, as Christians. If, by the purity of our worship and the truth of our doctrine we piously aim to be "the salt of the earth and the light of the world," this pious aim, to have its full effect; must diffuse itself through our whole conversation. Christianity is excellent, as furnishing a rule of worship, a plan of pure and exalted devotion. But the worship of God is only one part of our duty; and devotion is one ingredient only in our christian character. *That*, to be consistent must be made up of every virtue, and be adorned with every grace. It is an apostolic maxim; "Whatsoever you do, do all in the name of Christ." In all cases and circumstances support the name and honour of his disciples.

disciples. In this course of life God will be with us. We shall dwell in God, and God in us.

Lastly, If what hath been said, apply to encourage and animate our devotion and piety under very discouraging circumstances; if what hath been offered, goeth directly to comfort and invigorate our spirits, when we act almost alone in the cause of Christ and divine truth; and if in this view there be a power and sweetness in the consolations the text suggests—Let us reflect, how happy and glorious will it be for us, when, in the future world, we are raised above all those disheartening impressions which need these supports of faith, these assurances of grace.

The largest assembly of pious worshippers, which can be now convened, bears no proportion to that great multitude, which will be gathered from “every kindred, and tongue, and nation, before the throne, “and before the Lamb.” To that grand association, from these little meetings of two or three met together in the name of Christ, carry forward, Christians, your thoughts and hopes. *There* you will adore the Father of mercies and the Father of all, in a full, comprehensive and perfect assembly. *There* our differences shall cease, and our mutual animosities be forgotten. *There* one spirit of truth shall enlighten us, and one bond of love unite all the triumphant band. *There*, in the church of the first-born, in the temple

of everlasting light and glory, no error will attach itself to our devotions; no want of the countenance of others will damp our zeal; no gloomy, desponding apprehensions will hang upon our minds. Harmony and truth shall prevail: and, with harmony and truth, exalted devotion and fulness of joy.
Amen.

PRAYER

PRAYER before SERMON*.

ETERNAL and Almighty God, thou art God alone, and besides thee there is no other.—Worthy art thou, O Lord, to receive glory, honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. With humility and reverence, we bow before thee, as that ever living and supreme God, before whom angels and archangels bow down with profound veneration. Thousands of glorious spirits surround thy throne; ten thousand times ten thousand minister in thy presence. We rejoice, with holy gratitude, that we are invited to draw nigh to thee, in the duties of thy worship; and are encouraged by thy goodness and promises, to believe, that from this lower world, prayers and praises will be accepted by thee, the Father of spirits and the God who hearest prayer. We rejoice, that thou, O merciful Father, whose presence fills all nature, whose throne is in the heavens, whose glory no eye can behold, whose majesty and greatness no thoughts can comprehend,

* This and the following Prayer are added at particular request.

who

who dwellest not in temples made with hands, dost graciously condescend to dwell with the humble and contrite, and will hear the supplications of the righteous. Our souls would aspire to the joys of communion with thee, and to the felicity which flows from thy favour.

From heaven, the habitation of thy holiness and glory, have respect to the prayers of thy servants and to their supplications, O Lord our God, to hearken unto the cry and the prayers which thy servants shall pray before thee in this house. Hear thou from thy dwelling place, even from heaven; and when thou hearest, forgive. May there ever be presented unto thee, within these walls, the offerings of pure, humble and grateful devotion. "Increase" among thy servants who shall assemble here, and "in the world at large, a spirit of serious inquiry "into thy revealed word, that may alarm and awaken "those unhappy men who are asleep in unbelief, "or immersed in sensuality and vice, lest they be "given up to an hardened unsearching mind, the "most fatal state of thy rational creatures, made "for thyself and for endless improvement in truth "and righteousness*."

* Mr. Lindsey's Prayer before Sermon, on opening the New Chapel in Essex-street, March 29, 1778.

Send down thy special blessing on thy servant who shall, here, lead the worship of thy people, and preach unto them thy glorious and everlasting gospel. Animate and prosper his ministrations. In flame his heart with zeal and love; inspire his lips with eloquence and argument. May he have the honour and happiness of turning many to righteousness, and of spreading the knowledge and power of thy truth.

Open the hearts of thy people to receive the truth in the love of it: may they be disposed, with holy readiness, to know and do thy will: prepare and perfect them to every good work; may they taste, in the duties of devotion, the noblest pleasures; may they go away, from the instructions of thy house, enlightened and edified; and, by the word of thy truth, be preserved to thy heavenly kingdom. To thee, the king, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God be given, honour and glory for ever. *Amen.*

PRAYER

PRAYER after SERMON.

O Incomprehensible Jehovah ; the holy, holy, holy Lord God, the Almighty, the one only living and true God, the one supreme Father of all ; to whom and to whom alone the highest veneration and homage of thy rational creatures are due, may we now go away rejoicing in the profession of thy holy truth, disposed to advance it with renewed ardour of mind, and humbly resolving to walk worthy of it. May our profession of piety be regular, habitual and fervent. May it be supported and adorned by every amiable and useful virtue ; and carried into all the walks of life, cherishing candour and meekness, displaying itself in benevolence and all virtue, and guarding the purity of our minds and the sobriety of our conversation. May the admonitions, with which we have been now addressed, fix the best impressions on our minds ; may they awaken enquiry, promote candour, lead some into a more perfect knowledge of thy will, and confirm us all in holy desires to know and do it. May thy truth, with the knowledge, love and service of thee, the only true God, prevail more and more.

more. May it, from one Lord's day to another, be carried on, in this place, with increasing pleasure and success.

When thy servants who worship here shall finish their course of duty and service here on earth, may their children succeed to them in the same warfare of faith and holiness. May *they* in like manner, lift up their hearts unto thee, and teach those that come *after them* to praise, love and obey thee; till thy designs shall be accomplished in this world; and *we* and *they* and *all* who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity shall form one grand, triumphant assembly before the throne of the Eternal above, accepted according to thy mercy in Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

F I N I S.

Lately published by J. Toulmin, A. M.

1. The HISTORY of the TOWN of TAUNTON, in the County of *Somerset*: embellished with Plates. 4to. 7s. 6d. in boards.
2. The Meaning which the Word MYSTERY bears in the NEW TESTAMENT, considered and applied in a SERMON, preached to an Assembly of Ministers at *Exeter*, May 4, 1791. 6d.
3. SERMONS, principally, addressed to Youth; Second Edition: to which are added, Two SERMONS, never before published and some Forms of Prayer. 3s. 6d.
4. A REVIEW of the Life, Character, and Writings of the Rev. JOHN BIDDLE. M. A. 2s.



Preparing for the Press,

A new Edition of NEAL'S HISTORY of the PURITANS, 5 volumes, 8vo. To be succeeded by a History of the Protestant Dissenters from the *Revolution* to the Present Time.